



A large-scale abstract expressionist painting, likely a work by Jackson Pollock, serves as the background for the entire page. The composition is dominated by dark, earthy tones like browns, grays, and blacks, with occasional bright splashes of red, orange, and yellow. The brushwork is visible and expressive, with thick impasto and dynamic, swirling lines that suggest movement and emotion.

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISTS

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART • MUSEUM NEWS

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The five paintings published in this issue by the Museum's Curator of Contemporary Art, Robert Phillips, were acquired by the Museum over a period of 20 years, from 1952 to 1972, and are by five of the principal artists who created the school of American painting called Abstract Expressionism.

Ad Reinhardt's *Number 1, 1951* was purchased by the Museum from the Museum's 39th Annual Exhibition of Selected American Paintings in 1952. The next works by members of the school to be acquired were Mark Rothko's *Untitled*, 1960 and Hans Hofmann's *Night Spell*, 1965. Both were acquired with funds from the Edward Drummond Libbey bequest in 1970. Two years later the Museum acquired *Lily Pond*, painted in 1959 by Willem de Kooning.

Summer, painted by Adolph Gottlieb in 1964, entered the collection in 1977 as one of several

generous gifts from The Woodward Foundation of Washington, D.C.

These paintings form the core of a growing collection of contemporary American art. Their value to the community lies not only in their superb quality as individual works of art, but seen as part of a group, the paintings also demonstrate the creative vitality of a school of art which has had international influence during the past 30 years.

As the collection of contemporary art continues to grow, it will be in relation to the high quality reflected in these seminal works. Other movements and ideas will hopefully be represented on the same level of quality as these works, which show the foundation of America's greatest contribution to contemporary art history.

Roger Mandle, Director

Museum News

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Cover: HANS HOFMANN, *Night Spell* (detail)
See page 97

THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST works in the Museum's collection document a turning point in 20th century art. Their significance is best understood by tracing the development of American painting leading to international recognition of the movement that produced them.

In the 19th century, American artists such as Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins, influenced by the pleas of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman, encouraged young painters to look to their own country for the experiences necessary for artistic maturity rather than imitating those European subjects and styles then considered essential to success.

Among those who rejected the assumption that successful pictures had to reflect European influence, was a group of artists now called the Ash Can School. Robert Henri, its key personality, encouraged John Sloan, George Luks, William Glackens and Everett Shinn, all newspaper artist-reporters, to develop their quick sketches of life around them into paintings. The grimy aspects of New York street life which some of them painted, earned the group its Ash Can School title. These artists contended that pictures of actual life, however distasteful, were far more relevant than those which followed the tired formulas of European salon art. Although their approach may not seem unconventional today, it had two notable effects. Not only did it mark a renewed American artistic consciousness, but it also reasserted the necessity for artists of any period to produce new images if art is to remain meaningful. Although the Ash Can School seemed radical to the American public, a revolution in art had already occurred in Europe in a decidedly different form.

The conservatism of American art was revealed by the sensational International Exhibition of Modern Art in 1913 at the former Armory of the New York 69th Regiment. The work of European artists, although substantially out-numbered by American exhibitors, dramatically revealed the artistic revolution that had taken place in Europe. The public was scandalized by the radical Cubist, Fauve, Expressionist and Futurist art exhibited. Few Americans were prepared to grasp the significance of what they

saw, and even those American artists who had turned away from academic French art found these styles too radical to follow.

The advanced ideas of early 20th century European art were largely misunderstood by most American artists. Although there were exceptions, many who were impressed with the potential of Cubist or Fauve aesthetics mistakenly believed that geometric angles and arbitrary colors could be incorporated into essentially 19th century realist pictures, making them modern.

Ironically, two world-wide disasters—the great economic depression signalled in the United States by the stock market crash in 1929, and the outbreak of World War II in 1939—provided the climate in which American artists achieved a sense of identity. In late 1933 the federal government began a program of economic assistance to artists which played a vital role in the development of American art. Later, the Public Works of Art Project, established in 1935 by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), supported over 4,000 artists. As this project, unlike its predecessor, did not require evidence of professional accomplishment, younger artists without established reputations were able to receive economic assistance.

Among those who benefited from this support were Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt and Adolph Gottlieb. The project also heightened the sense of community among American artists, particularly those in New York City. As WPA employees, artists worked together on various projects, providing a climate which encouraged the exchange of ideas.

The environment created by government support of artists was further enlivened by the appearance of contemporary European art in permanent public collections. For the first time American artists could view the most recent developments in European art as part of their own environment. From 1927 until 1943 the Gallatin collection of modern art was housed in the library of New York University near the neighborhood where many artists lived. The Museum of Modern Art opened in 1929 and began

assembling the largest and most comprehensive collection of modern art in the world. By 1936 it had organized a series of major loan exhibitions surveying Cubism, Fauvism, Dada and Surrealism, the most influential movements in Paris during the 20th century. The Museum of Non-Objective Art, later the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, opened in 1939. This constant exposure to modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Joan Miró had a profound effect on New York artists.

The arrival in America of artist-teachers who in Europe had participated in the birth of the modern movement also played a major role in shaping art. Hans Hofmann and Josef Albers, two highly influential German-born artists, settled here in 1932 and 1933. Hofmann's teaching, based on first-hand knowledge of Cubist composition and Fauve color, gave many young artists an understanding of the spirit of modernism which had begun before World War I. Albers' teaching, centered on the objective of interaction of color, gave two generations of young artists a different view of the implications of abstract art than did Hofmann's.

Several influential European artists spent the war years in New York. Stimulated by their new environment, Piet Mondrian and others introduced American themes into their characteristic manners of expression. Among Surrealists who were to exert the strongest influence on the development of Abstract Expressionism were Marcel Duchamp, Matta and André Masson, as well as the movement's literary mentor André Breton.

The catalyst in its development was the largely unexplored process of abstract automatism introduced by the Surrealists. Automatism as a means of stimulating artists' imaginations was not an entirely new discovery; Leonardo da Vinci drew images derived from changing cloud forms or from old cracked and broken wall surfaces. In the 1920s, Miró, Masson and others practiced abstract Surrealism based on techniques of free association, chance and improvisation.

The atmosphere of New York in the 1930s was ripe for the appearance of a new art. As Fauve color,

Cubist form and abstract Surrealism were gradually assimilated, a fundamentally American art emerged for the first time. The critic Clement Greenberg wrote that by 1940 New York artists "had caught up with Paris as Paris had not yet caught up with herself, and a group of relatively obscure American artists already possessed the fullest painting culture of their time."

Abstract Expressionism rejected the implications of geometric principles underlying Cubism. Mondrian had already taken Cubism to a logical conclusion, creating a formal, non-objective art using geometry and unemotional primary colors. What the Abstract Expressionists sought was a process to enable them to express their emotions directly, if subjectively. For most of them automatism was the means of discovery. As Irvin Sandler wrote in *The Triumph of American Painting*, "the Abstract Expressionists turned to their own private visions and insights in an anxious search for new values. The urgent need for meanings that felt truer to their experience gave rise to new ways of seeing—to formal innovations—their preoccupation was with investing forms with meanings that related to the whole of human experience."

The Abstract Expressionists share an attitude toward art and life rather than a recognizably similar style. The paintings in the Toledo collection reveal similarities more basic than the way each artist applied paint to canvas, similarities which result from a shared heritage and need for personal means of expression. These paintings also reveal the two distinct directions which emerged from Abstract Expressionism after 1950: gesture painting as seen in the work of Hans Hofmann and Willem de Kooning, and color-field painting as exemplified by Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt and Adolph Gottlieb. Both of these directions have affected the course of art everywhere.

Robert F. Phillips

HANS HOFMANN 1880-1966

Night Spell

Hans Hofmann was a key figure in the development of Abstract Expressionism. As a young artist he saw the birth of modern art in Paris between 1904 and 1914. He first came to the United States at the age of 50. During the next 25 years he was one of the most influential art teachers and theorists in this country. While for years his reputation as a painter was eclipsed by teaching, by the mid-50s he emerged as a major Abstract Expressionist.

Born in Bavaria, Hofmann began his education in Munich. His aptitude for mathematics and science was evident early, for at 18 he invented one of the earliest patented adding machines, called an electromagnetic comptometer. Hofmann's father, eager to reward his son's accomplishment and to encourage an engineering career, gave him a sizable sum of money. Rejecting his father's plan for its use, Hofmann spent it on tuition for art classes. One of his teachers, Willie Schwartz, introduced him to the Impressionist theory of painting light reflected from forms, and located a patron who was to support Hofmann as a struggling young painter in Paris.

Soon after his arrival in Paris, Hofmann became friends with many of the artists who formed Fauvism and Cubism. Having experimented with Matisse's Fauve color and expressive interpretation of form, he became intrigued with the first Cubist paintings of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. However, in these years he was closest to Robert Delaunay, whose colorist painting derived from Cubism (fig.1), led to Hofmann's mature style. An artist of acknowledged promise, Hofmann was overwhelmed by the revolutionary art he saw being created. Rather than be an imitator, he struggled for years to "sweat Cubism out," as he later said.

When he went to Munich in 1914 to visit his ailing sister, the outbreak of World War I prevented his return to Paris. Unfit for the army due to a lung condition, in 1915 he began teaching art from economic necessity. Although Hofmann developed slowly as an artist, the post-war years saw him become a highly successful teacher, attracting numerous foreign students.

As his reputation grew, he was invited to teach at



Figure 1
ROBERT DELAUNAY, French (1885-1941)
The City of Paris, about 1911
Oil on canvas
Signed and inscribed on lower right:
la ville de Paris/r. delaunay
47 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 67 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (119.5 × 172.2 cm.)
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey 55.38

the University of California at Berkeley during the summers of 1930 and 1931. Feeling threatened by the new Nazi government because of his ideas on art, Hofmann decided to live in America, in 1934 establishing his own school in New York, and in 1935 beginning summer classes at Provincetown on Cape Cod. A dedicated and dynamic teacher, Hofmann's remarkable experience and abilities earned him a decisive role in the development of modern art in America. Although it may have delayed his development as a painter, teaching forced him to formulate and articulate clearly the theoretical basis on which his own art was built.

Hofmann had his first American solo exhibition in 1931 at San Francisco. The exhibition, entirely of drawings, reflected Hofmann's need to clarify his ideas before returning to painting several years later. His paintings of the mid-1930s were landscapes and still lifes derived from Fauvism and Cubism. Despite his high-keyed Fauve color, Hofmann's years of drawing led to defining objects with lines rather than color masses. By 1939, as his painting had become increasingly abstract, he became less interested in emphasizing subject matter and more involved in the dynamics of the painting process and the interaction of colors.

During the early 30s, under the liberating influence of Surrealist automatism, Hofmann's art began to develop in several directions. In this particularly active period, he explored Surrealist subjects in paintings of fantastic creatures. At the same time he continued with planar Cubism, showing increased mastery of color. Hofmann's line, once rather mechanical and brittle, took on a more fluid quality as his work became more improvisational. At this time he also extended the potential of the liquidity of paint in canvases on which he dribbled, poured and splattered free, abstract compositions. Among these pictures, *Effervescence*, 1944 (fig. 2), is notable as foretelling his future direction. High spirited as its title implies, this picture is dominated by a multi-edged form poured onto the left center of the composition. It seems to float upward from the bubbling mass at the bottom, its scalloped edges echoed by the dark forms at the top edge.



Figure 2
HANS HOFMANN, American (1880-1966)
Effervescence, 1944
Oil, india ink, casein and enamel on plywood panel
54 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 33 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (138.1 × 91.2 cm.)
University Art Museum, Berkeley, California;
gift of the artist 1965.9

Also in 1944 Hofmann was given his first New York one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, where other Abstract Expressionists were being introduced. In 1948 his first retrospective exhibition was held at the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts. At the same time Hofmann published *Search for the Real and Other Essays*, a statement of his philosophy in which reverence for the mystery of aesthetic creativity is balanced by objective consideration of pictorial construction. He formalized his ideas on painting since Cezanne, acknowledging Fauvism and Cubism as the major movements leading to contemporary art. Hofmann also emphasized that the painter's canvas is a reality that must be reckoned with as a flat, two-dimensional surface, that any artist violating the visual integrity of this surface would produce a fragmentary and unsatisfactory work.

However, Hofmann did not advocate an art which only decorated the surface. He believed "serious art" must have a "push and pull" effect. By this he meant that when the advancing and receding properties of colors are considered in relation to size and placement of shapes and to varied textures of the painted surface, the artist can produce, as he put it, the sensation of enlivened space without deep recessions or highly modelled forms. While acknowledging that painting had and still could depict recognizable subjects, Hofmann firmly stated that

plasticity rather than the imitation of appearances is the key to artistic quality.

Hofmann's creative drive was protean. In a given painting he might use such varied handling as delicate washes barely straining the canvas, stroke after stroke of color crushed into wet color, and trailings of color flung across slab-like shapes. This amazing arsenal of techniques gave him a symphonic range of expression from contemplative calm to exuberant frenzy.

In 1954 he used mosaic-like strokes set against large, freely-brushed color planes, producing an effect of shimmering motion. Never willing to restrict himself to one mode of expression, he repeatedly came back to this approach, and in the next two years color rectangles emerged as dominant forms. During the last decade of his life Hofmann explored the endless possibilities of this style in a grand synthesis of his competing urges toward expressionism and order.

Night Spell (Plate I); in the Museum's collection, is a result of that synthesis. Painted in 1965 when Hofmann was a vigorous 85, it shows the expressive power of his color-rectangle style. Separated from the others by a large area of dull pink, the lower rectangle dramatizes the "push and pull" effect, the basis of the artist's space concept. Careful study of the pinkish center reveals that in developing the picture, Hofmann painted out several forms in the process of simplification. Other rectangles are suggested by different directions of brushstrokes. Small, apparently random strokes of color throughout the painting contrast with the dominant forms, heightening the prevailing sense of monumentality.

The visual tension and sense of movement in *Night Spell* are characteristic of Hofmann's translation of the balance between dynamic natural forces into paint on canvas. As does his work as a whole, this picture communicates his exuberance and robust pleasure in the act of painting. For, unlike Willem de Kooning, whose work often expressed a feeling of anxiety, or Mark Rothko, whose view of mankind was essentially tragic, Hofmann's art celebrates life.

WILLEM DE KOONING 1904-

Lily Pond

By 1959, when de Kooning painted *Lily Pond*, (Plate II) Abstract Expressionism had received world-wide critical acclaim as the successor to the School of Paris, and Willem de Kooning was acknowledged as a leading figure of it. The year before, a comprehensive exhibition, "The New American Painting," organized by the Museum of Modern Art, had toured eight major European cities. The exhibition, which included five de Koonings, had forced public and critics to acknowledge the creative power of these American painters. Such acceptance came to de Kooning after years of difficulty.

Born in Rotterdam, Holland, de Kooning was apprenticed at age 12 to a commercial art and decorating firm. He showed unusual aptitude and enrolled in evening classes at the Rotterdam Academy of Fine Arts and Techniques, where during eight years he learned guild and art academy disciplines, including lettering, perspective and proportion, as well as drawing from plaster casts and live models. This traditional training taught creating the illusion of form by foreshortening, and rendering volume with light and shadow. It was also based on the guild principle that an artist should be able to make his living by working at a trade such as carpentry, designing, painting and decorating, as well as portraiture. This practical training enabled him to survive the difficult early years in America.

After repeated attempts to reach America as a deck hand on the Holland-America Line, he finally came as a stowaway in 1926. During his first year he was a house painter in Hoboken, New Jersey, but in 1927 moved to Manhattan, supporting himself with commercial art jobs, department store display, sign painting and carpentry while continuing to paint pictures in his spare time.

A lively community developed in New York during the early 30s among artists with opposing views on politics, life and art. This stimulating environment suited de Kooning, and his biographer, Thomas B. Hess, notes he frequently joined in the "long, chaotic, brilliant, funny conversation about art [which] began in the mid-30s and continued for more than 20 years." Among de Kooning's friends were Arshile Gorky and John Graham. Graham was a

painter and charismatic personality whose ideas on art influenced many contemporaries. His book on aesthetics, *System and Dialectics of Art* (1937) was read by many young artists. Although de Kooning and others in Graham's circle were acquainted with the scribble-like techniques of automatic drawing and painting through reproductions of pictures by André Masson and Joan Miró, they rarely practiced it until influenced by Graham.

While Graham's ideas attracted de Kooning, it was Gorky's art which opened de Kooning's eyes to new possibilities. Gorky had served a long self-imposed apprenticeship to the art of Ingres, Cézanne, Picasso and Miró, and was just emerging as an important artist. Their friendship had a decisive effect on de Kooning's development. Years later in an *Art News* review of the memorial exhibition after Gorky's tragic suicide, de Kooning was described as one of Gorky's influences. He replied in a letter to the editor, "When, about 15 years ago, I walked into Arshile's studio for the first time, the atmosphere was so beautiful that I got a little dizzy and when I came to, I was bright enough to take the hint immediately. If the bookkeepers think it is necessary continuously to make sure of where things and people come from, well then, I come from 36 Union Square [Gorky's studio]."

In 1935 de Kooning was first able to paint full-time when employed by the Federal Arts Project. Although he had to resign because he was not yet an American citizen, that opportunity strengthened his resolve to be a serious artist. One assignment was working under the eminent French Cubist, Fernand Léger on a mural for the French Line pier. In 1937 de Kooning was commissioned to design part of a mural for the Hall of Pharmacy at the New York World's Fair. While the flat, semi-abstract composition reflects Léger's influence, it also forecasts the undulating energy of his mature style.

From 1938 de Kooning's paintings reveal a new sense of freedom. The edges of shapes formerly closed by sharp contrasts with adjacent areas became open forms, sometimes defined only with line. Rather than first drawing with line, de Kooning drew with his brush as part of the painting process.



Plate II
WILLEM DE KOONING, American (1904-)
Lily Pond, 1959
Oil on canvas
Signed upper left: deKooning
70 $\frac{1}{4}$ ₆ × 80 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (178.3 × 203.5 cm.)
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey 72.32

This enabled him to rapidly change parts of figures and backgrounds, giving a sense of shifting forms and space.

Although de Kooning's figures became increasingly abstract, before 1945 they were still recognizable images, recalling his debt to Picasso. He first submerged the identity of subjects in rhythmic abstract still lifes focused on the actual painting process. Automatism freed him to combine geometric still life shapes and abstracted anatomical fragments into fantastic organic forms. In contrast with other artists who were working to reduce their pictures to the fewest pure geometric forms possible, de Kooning crowded as much as possible into his, transforming geometry and anatomy into a stream of consciousness diary reflecting experiences of daily life. By 1948 de Kooning and other Abstract Expressionists had bridged the gap between ambition and capability. They had assimilated from Cubism and abstract Surrealism what was needed to go beyond what had already been accomplished.

Certain pictures of the next few years are among the greatest works of de Kooning's career. Beginning with *Ashville* (fig. 3), he successfully integrated fragmentary images in spatial relationships which made it impossible to separate foreground from background. It is the emotional force of his obsessive imagery combined with spatial ambiguity which charges the entire surface with restless energy. De Kooning sees modern life as the interaction of changing occurrences in a "no-environment" which is both inside and outside, both psychological and physical. To express this he adopted an improvisatory technique in which images are discovered during painting. Using this risk-laden technique, he has created paintings in which each line and form is charged with multiple meanings.

Gradually, de Kooning's densely packed gestural abstractions of the late 40s evolved into a series of *Woman* (fig. 4). When these frenzied works were first exhibited in 1953 they outraged formalist critics, abstract artists and the public alike. De Kooning was accused of betraying abstract art and hating women. In trying to explain the paintings de Kooning said, "The Women had to do with the female painted



Figure 3
WILLEM DE KOONING, American (1904-)
Ashville, 1949
Oil on masonite
Signed lower left: de Kooning
25 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (65.1 × 81 cm.)
The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

through all the ages, all those idols, and maybe I was stuck to a certain extent; I couldn't go on. It did one thing for me: it eliminated composition, arrangement, relationships, light—all this silly talk about line, color and form—because that [Women] was the thing I wanted to get hold of." In comparing this *Woman* series with earlier paintings of the theme it is clear that in the later ones de Kooning fused the human image to the inside-outside "no-environment," a challenge that had long eluded him. De Kooning's *Woman* also updates the female in Western art. As Irving Sandler wrote, she "continues in the tradition of the females of Picasso, Léger and Soutine, but she is far more immediate and frenzied, incorporating a multiplicity of intimate and unnerving feelings about woman as both human and majestic cult image,



Figure 4
WILLEM DE KOONING, American (1904-)
Woman I, 1950-52
Oil on canvas
75 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 58 in. (192.7 × 147.3 cm.)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

about man's relationship to her, and about sex."

As de Kooning concluded this series, the figure became engulfed by the abstract "no-environment." The paintings that followed were composed with slashing brushstrokes and complex interwoven lines reminiscent of the Women. But their titles: *Police Gazette*, *Saturday Night* and *The Time of the Fire* evoke life in New York.

During the mid-50s many of de Kooning's friends moved from Manhattan to Easthampton, Long Island. When he left the city to visit them he was stimulated by the sensations of highway speed, open countryside, saltwater marshes and open sky. Responding to them, he began to simplify his work. By 1957 the impacted forms of the city paintings were replaced by expansive open gestures. *Lily Pond* belongs to this phase. Painted early in 1959, it was in a New York exhibition of recent work that May, and illustrated in Thomas Hess's *Willem de Kooning* published that year (plate 155). It was untitled, for like many of de Kooning's pictures it was only given a name later: Lily Pond Lane in Easthampton is a residential area where de Kooning once considered buying a house.

In *Lily Pond*, the nervous agitation of de Kooning's linear paintings is replaced by broad, assured brushstrokes built into masses which appear to rush across the canvas, suggesting powerful natural forces shifting in space. Each form overlaps and, in turn is overlapped by another, allowing no one of them to surge toward the viewer. De Kooning also draws attention to the fluidity of oil paint by painting veils of color over wet color, at the same time enhancing sensations of light and space.

However, de Kooning did not depict a specific landscape. His comment on another painting in this series applies equally well to *Lily Pond*: "I don't think I set out to do anything . . . I must have subconsciously found a way of setting it down on paper, on canvas. It could be that—I'm not sure . . . That's what fascinates me—to make something I can never be sure of, and no one else can either. I will never know and no one else will ever know. That's the way art is."



Plate V
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB, American (1903-1974)
Summer, 1964
Oil on canvas
Signed and inscribed on reverse: Adolph Gottlieb/
"SUMMER"/48 X 36"/1964/6404
48 X 36 in. (121.9 X 91.4 cm.)
Gift of The Woodward Foundation 77.9

Plate IV
AD REINHARDT, American (1913-1967)
Number I, 1951
Oil on canvas
79 1/8 X 34 in. (202.9 X 86.4 cm.)
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey 52.99

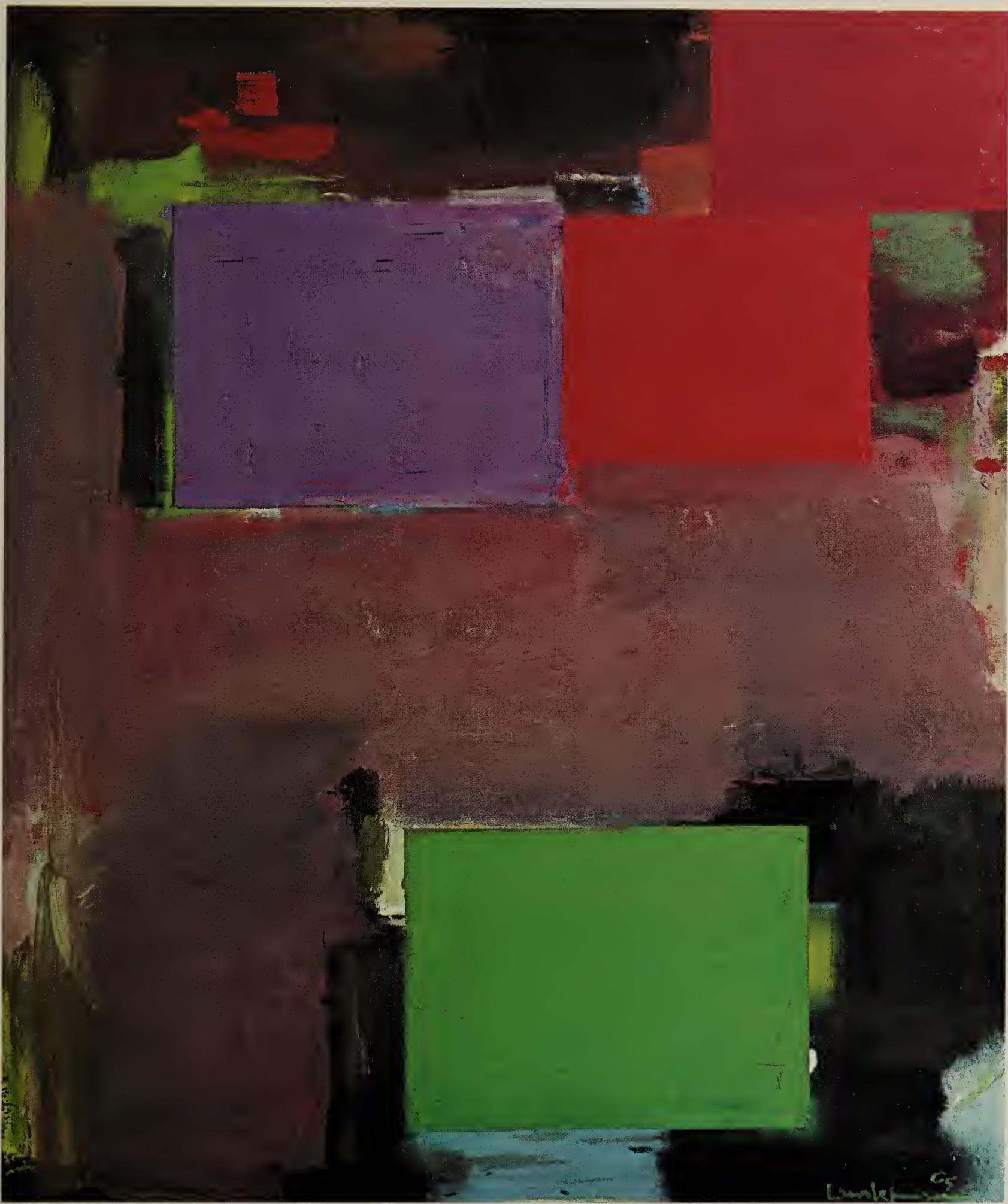


Plate I
HANS HOFMANN, American (1880-1966)

Night Spell, 1965

Oil on canvas

Signed and dated lower right: *hans hofmann/65*

Signed and inscribed on reverse: #1607/72 X 60/
night spell/oil on canvas/hans hofmann
72 X 60 in. (182.9 X 152.8 cm.)

Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey 70.50

MARK ROTHKO 1903-1970

Untitled

The steady development of Mark Rothko's art contrasts with the abrupt shifts in style in Willem de Kooning and Hans Hofmann. While their creative activity has been characterized by restless changes in painting styles, Rothko demonstrated unusual "single-mindedness in the pursuit of a vision," according to Robert Goldwater.

Rothko was born in Dvinsk, Russia. His family brought him to America in 1913, settling in Portland, Oregon. After school there, in 1921 he entered Yale University, but left after two years from lack of interest in formal education. He moved to New York in 1925 and began to draw from the model, and while he studied painting briefly in Max Weber's class at the Art Students League, Rothko later maintained he was a self-taught artist.

In 1929, the year of his first New York group show, he began teaching art to children at the Center Academy in Brooklyn, continuing until 1952. In 1933 the Contemporary Arts Gallery gave him his first solo exhibition, and like many other artists he also worked on the WPA Federal Arts Project in New York in 1936-37.

Rothko's work as a young man is not well documented, although he exhibited relatively early. He began as a figurative painter, and pictures from the 30s are described as "isolated figures depicted in an urban setting."

Subway Scene, painted in 1938, is one of few paintings from this period which have been published to date. It depicts a quiet moment in the New York subway. In the foreground of the painting two people are shown descending the stairs. Other figures stand quietly in the background near the turnstile gate entering the subway. It is an introspective work with many qualities which appear in Rothko's art throughout his career. The subject is composed so the architectural forms lie parallel to the edges of the picture, suppressing the dynamic potential of diagonals. Floor, ceiling and columns frame the composition so the center is a rectangle of light where figures appear as actors on a proscenium stage.

Drama was of central importance to Rothko, for

in it he saw the distillation of "the human tragedy" which preoccupied him. His choice of subjects was influenced by Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, and later by the ancient Greek tragedies of Aeschylus. Rothko hoped to reinterpret the timeless symbols of man's fears and passions which form the basis of human tragedy in Greek mythology. Searching for subjects he said, "I felt the need for a group of actors who are able to move dramatically without embarrassment and execute gestures without shame." By painting the human image to achieve the quality of drama he wanted, it would be necessary for him to distort or mutilate it, an idea he rejected as sadistic. Reluctantly, he abandoned the figure because he believed it could no longer express the universal drama of human existence. In a 1943 radio broadcast with Adolph Gottlieb entitled "Art in New York," he said, "Today, the artist is no longer constrained by the limitation that all of man's experience is expressed by his outward appearance. Freed from the need of describing a particular person, the possibilities are endless . . . in that sense it can be said that all of art is the portrait of an idea."

For a time it appeared he had resolved his dilemma with adoption of the Surrealist technique of automatism by combining human, animal, fish and plant parts in biomorphic mutations. For about five years after 1942, Rothko's paintings suggest primordial or ritualistic forms floating in a luminous atmosphere. At this time he often used watercolor to achieve the luminous effects he favored. In *Vessels of Magic*, 1946 (fig. 5) Rothko defined forms with abbreviated calligraphic line over delicate films of color. His vaguely symbolic forms appear suspended in a field of color created by transparent vertical and horizontal strokes. A dark band of color across the top creates an ambiguous space into which one bubble-like form appears to rise.

Later that year Rothko's art underwent a dramatic change. Having decided that any references to recognizable subject matter prevented achieving the universal quality of myth he sought, he stopped defining forms with calligraphy. Once freed from symbolism and the constraints of line, using thin color washes, he painted forms which appear to drift across the picture.



Figure 5
MARK ROTHKO, American (1903-1970)
Vessels of Magic, 1946
Watercolor on paper
38 3/4 × 25 3/4 in. (98.4 × 65.4 cm.)
The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York

Rothko's first entirely abstract paintings were diffuse. To reinforce their forms, he made shapes softly rectangular as in *Number 18*, 1948 (fig. 6). As paintings no longer referred to nature, he simply gave them numbers or the names of colors used; later he left them untitled.

By 1950 Rothko reduced the number of shapes to three or four horizontal rectangles. He simplified compositions by placing the elements above one

another in a symmetrical arrangement almost covering the canvas from edge to edge. For the next twenty years he never changed this simple format, except in the huge paintings commissioned in 1964 by Mr. and Mrs. John de Menil for the chapel in Houston later named for the artist. Here vertical rectangles were required by the wide horizontal canvases proportioned to the chapel walls.

While the shapes in Rothko's mature paintings are soft-edged rectangles, they should not be confused with geometric abstractions. These rectangles are color areas rather than geometrically assertive forms. By vertically stacking them in an arrangement echoing the shape of the canvas, Rothko emphasized the field effect of his shapes. While sympathetic to abstract art as a means of expression, he rejected formalistic, nonobjective art as dehumanizing. As he did not want to be confused with other painters who exploited the sensuous and decorative qualities of color, he also insisted he was not a colorist.

Since the effect of color is intensified in proportion to the area it covers, it seems logical Rothko painted large pictures for that reason. More important is the relationship of the size of his paintings to that of the viewer. When asked why he painted such large pictures, Rothko said, "I realize that historically the function of painting large pictures is painting something very grandiose and pompous. The reason I paint them however—I think it applies to other painters I know—is precisely because I want to be very intimate and human. To paint a small picture is to place yourself outside experience . . . However you paint the larger picture, you are in it."

Rothko's paintings became progressively darker after 1950. Seen in chronological order, they suggest subtle changes in his state of mind during 20 years. The Museum's *Untitled*, 1960 (Plate III) was painted with the brooding tonalities he favored in his last years. Somber red, purple and brown replace the light yellow, pink and green tonalities often used in the early 50s.

Untitled exemplifies the expressive power Rothko





Figure 6
MARK ROTHKO, American (1903-1970)
Number 18, 1948
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated: Mark Rothko 1949
 $67\frac{1}{4} \times 55\frac{1}{8}$ in. (170.8 \times 141.9 cm.)
Vassar College Art Gallery 55.6.6

achieved within self-imposed limitations. By reducing the composition to three rectangles floating on a single color field, the painting can be immediately seen as a whole. The texture of paint is suppressed by staining thin layers of paint into the canvas weave. Even the edge of the picture is softened by continuing the purple ground around the sides. Rothko's dematerialized color appears to glow as if from the light of the ember-red rectangle hovering between two darker forms whose softly-brushed edges allow each rectangle to alternately float toward the viewer or dissolve into a mysterious void.

In a 1961 *Art News* article, "The Abstract Sublime," Robert Rosenblum discussed the visionary aspect of Rothko's art together with the art of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman. He compared Rothko's paintings with those of 19th century Romantic artists Caspar David Friedrich and J.M.W. Turner. In Rothko's painting "the floating, horizontal tiers of veiled light . . . seem to conceal a total, remote presence that we can only intuit and never fully grasp. These infinite, glowing voids carry us beyond reason to the Sublime; we can only submit to them in an act of faith and let ourselves be absorbed into their radiant depths." These remarks may also be applied to the Museum's *Untitled*.

Rothko's work, although slow to gain public acceptance in the late 50s and early 60s, had a profound influence on younger artists. His unobtrusive style allowed them to see the emotional and structural potential of color and to achieve an all-over field effect without copying the gestural brush-stroke which characterized the work of Jackson Pollock, Hans Hofmann and Willem de Kooning. At the time the possibilities of color-field painting seemed far greater due to the examples of Rothko and other color-field painters such as Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt.

Plate III
MARK ROTHKO, American (1903-1970)
Untitled, 1960
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated on reverse: MARK ROTHKO 1960
 $82\frac{1}{8} \times 81$ in. (235.9 \times 205.7 cm.)
Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey 70.55

The work of each of these artists makes us aware of the capacity of color to affect human perception, thought and emotion. However, through Mark Rothko's paintings we can most directly experience our own human condition through the emotional impact of color.

AD REINHARDT 1913-1967

Number 1, 1951

Ad Reinhardt was not only a painter. He was also an art historian and, for many years, a satirical cartoonist. He was also one of the most severe critics of the personality cult and commercialism surrounding Abstract Expressionism after 1950.

While his paintings unquestionably have affinities with the work of others in the group, he tried to purge his pictures of spatial effects, emotion and all traces of the painting act. His effort to create an impersonal and pure abstract art parallels the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevitch, who had seemingly reduced painting to a minimum in his celebrated 1918 painting, *White on White* (fig. 7), a white square on a white background.

Adolph Frederick Reinhardt was born in Buffalo, New York in 1913, the year, he later recalled, that Malevitch painted his first complete abstraction. In accounts of his childhood and student years, Reinhardt ironically mentioned winning prizes and medals for his pictures, including pencil portraits of heroes such as Jack Dempsey, Babe Ruth and Abraham Lincoln. In spite of his dead-pan humor, these comments indicate how important acceptance was to him. Later, when his abstract art was ignored or derisively rejected, he was understandably bitter. "I was left out of most of the museum shows. The Museum of Modern Art got showing me about 12 years after they showed Still and Rothko . . . It used to be a sore point but it wasn't so bad because it kept me young."

From 1931 until 1935 Reinhardt studied at Columbia University. At the suggestion of Meyer Shapiro, he became active in university politics. When his Cubist-style cartoon of the "rectangular" university president beating "curvilinear" babies into conformity with a club was rejected by the editor of the school publication, Reinhardt created an academic freedom issue over the rejection, and later that year became editor. After graduating from Columbia, Reinhardt studied with various teachers including Carl Holty, who encouraged him to join the American Abstract Artists group. In 1937 he was hired by the Federal Arts Project. Later, he became acquainted with Stuart Davis, whose Synthetic Cubist style influenced Reinhardt's work for several



Figure 7

KASIMIR MALEVITCH, Russian (1878-1935)
Suprematist Composition: White on White, 1918
Oil on canvas
31 1/4 x 31 1/4 in. (79.4 x 79.4 cm.)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

years, though in a 1945 essay Reinhardt criticized Davis for "introducing figurative elements into abstraction."

Reinhardt's brightly colored Cubist paintings were often painted from colored paper studies. Although indebted to Davis and Piet Mondrian, these early works reveal sophisticated control of color and complex compositions, and by 1940 he was breaking up geometric shapes into repetitious patterns of small irregular forms. In 1944 Reinhardt began studying art history with the Orientalist Alfred Salmony. His cartoons were also being published regularly by the Socialist newspaper *P.M.*, and toward the end of World War II he was drafted.

The year after discharge in 1946, he began teaching Islamic, Indian and Chinese art history at Brook-



Figure 8
AD REINHARDT, American (1913-1967)
Number 18, 1948-49
Oil on canvas
40×60 in. (101.6×152.4 cm.)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase Acquisition, 53.13

lyn College, and from 1959 at Hunter College in New York. Extensive travels in Europe, the Middle East and Asia supplemented formal studies, giving Reinhardt a more comprehensive knowledge of world art history than any other American artist of his generation. His view of abstract art was influenced as much by admiration of Chinese art as by understanding Cubism and Mondrian's Neoplasticism.

As he developed his idea of a "pure abstract art" Reinhardt placed as much value on ethics as aesthetics, for he believed an artist's morality and values are expressed in his work. Also convinced the artist must maintain a certain aloofness from society, his ideals were the classic Sung painters of 10th and 11th century China, who were "sage-scholar-hermit-gentlemen . . . who decline to accept

official positions, refuse to take payment for their pictures and are kind to everyone." Reinhardt saw in Sung painting "the most pure, most beautiful and most noble school that ever existed." Intended for meditation and contemplation, "there seems to be almost nothing to say, and sometimes nothing to see, certainly nothing to 'heave the bosom' for, like the calligraphies, colors and qualities that normally move art lovers. Anyway the nothingness to see there can be 'all seen in one glance'."

In the early 40s Reinhardt fragmented Cubist compositions into all-over patterns, and about 1949 he made softly-brushed calligraphic pictures which were less geometric and more reminiscent of Mark Tobey's abstract writing (fig. 8). Simultaneously, he painted compositions of interwoven blurred squares of color. In others he painted angular patterns with crisp brushstrokes, leaving patches of unpainted white background as part of the composition. The field effect persisted whether he smoothed out brushstrokes or left them in as carefully considered gestural strokes. These improvisational pictures are more closely related to works of that time by Hofmann and Rothko than to geometric abstraction.

The Museum's *Number 1*, 1951 [Plate IV] belongs to this group. Each brushstroke is part of the pattern covering the canvas. While still retaining traces of relational compositions in which one part of the picture is balanced by another, it is essentially a color-field painting. Reinhardt balances light magenta, blue and blackish tones, giving each equal emphasis. The softly electric color harmony is characteristic of his individual color sense. Most fascinating, perhaps is the use of gray and greenish-black, foretelling the nearly invisible later "Black paintings."

From 1951 when Reinhardt began painting completely symmetrical pictures which could be comprehended in one glance, his pictures superficially resemble checkerboard patterning. Several years later he darkened his colors with black, and in 1960 made what he considered his ultimate picture — a five foot square canvas composed of nine almost identical blackish squares. He continued to paint variations on this theme until his death in 1967.

ADOLPH GOTTLIEB 1903-1974

Summer

Through simplified abstract symbols on an uniformly colored background, Adolph Gottlieb brought together the attributes of color-field painting and gestural Abstract Expressionism. More than any other Abstract Expressionist, his clarity of color and refinement of gesture reflect the influence of European art.

Gottlieb was born in New York. He dropped out of high school at 17, and while working at various part-time jobs attended evening classes at the Art Students League, studying painting under John Sloan and Robert Henri. The next year he worked his passage to Europe on a ship, spending six months in Paris sketching, painting and constantly visiting the Louvre. After a year's travel in Europe, Gottlieb returned to New York and finished high school. He then studied at Parsons School of Design to prepare for a teaching career, but shortly changed his mind and began painting, supporting himself with part-time work.

Gottlieb's pictures of the late 20s and early 30s were influenced by Cézanne and Matisse. In 1930 he had his first one-man show at a New York gallery, and during the mid-30s exhibited regularly with "The Ten," a loosely organized group whose common bond was their rejection of American Scene and Social Realist painting. Due to his active exhibition record, in 1936 Gottlieb got a job as an easel painter with the Federal Arts Project.

In 1937 he and his wife moved near Tucson, Arizona. The desert had a profound effect on his work, for he found a new vocabulary of forms in cacti, gourds and bones, and his work became more abstract. After returning to New York in 1939 Gottlieb began spending summers in Gloucester, Massachusetts, painting objects from the beach arranged in shelved boxes. By placing unrelated objects in separate compartments it was possible to make unexpected combinations of shapes, as in *The Sea Chest* (fig. 9).

In an interview printed by *Art News* in its issue published in December, 1973, he said, "I didn't do very many paintings like that, but it led to the idea of the 'pictographs' where instead of having a realistic representation of an object in a box, I had more



Figure 9
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB, American (1903-1974)
The Sea Chest, 1942
Oil on canvas
26 x 34 in. (66 x 86.3 cm.)
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

of a symbolic representation, and at the time I was interested in surrealism . . . So I used the process that was similar to automatic writing, which was using an arbitrary division of the canvas into rough rectangular areas and . . . I would put various images and symbols within these compartments . . . There was no direct connection one to the other. However, by the strange juxtapositions that occurred a new kind of significance" resulted. "I wanted these symbols to have a certain kind of ambiguity and mystery. However, I was not a symbolic painter in the sense that through symbols I was trying to communicate with people. This was not my intention. I was making a picture"

Gottlieb called these paintings "pictographs" to express disdain for accepted ideas of how a picture should be fashioned. He and his friend Mark Rothko used symbolism based on mythology in the hope that they had rediscovered the basis for a new content in painting. However, from 1941, when he

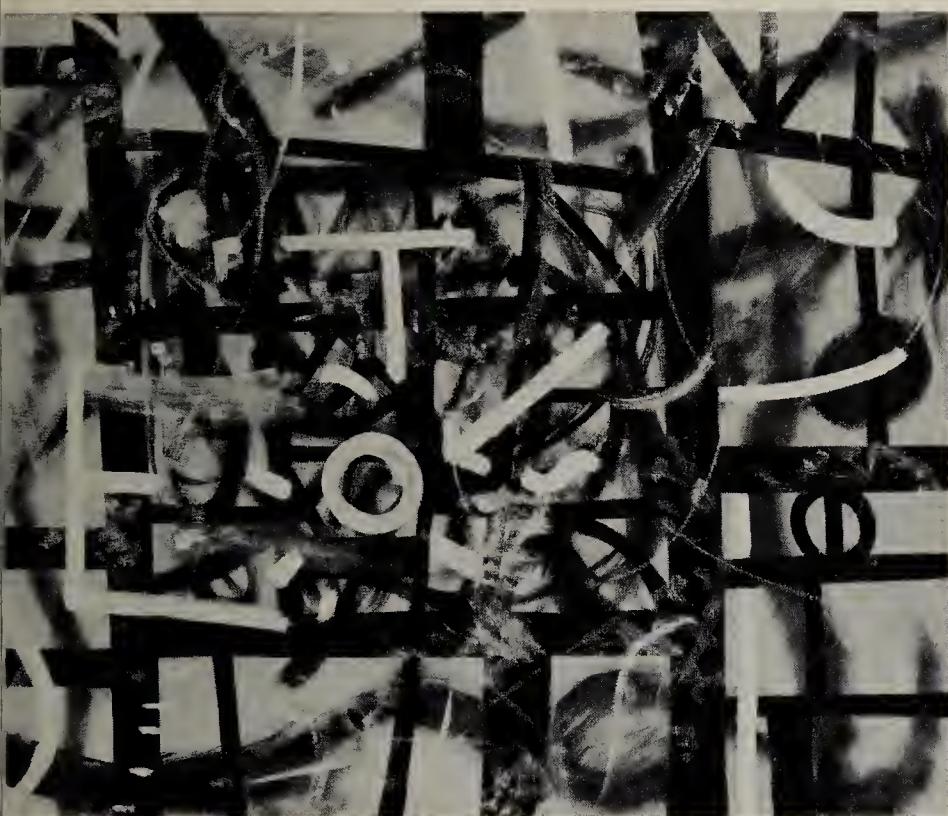


Figure 10
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB, American (1903-1974)
Blue at Noon, 1955
Oil on canvas
60×72 in. (152.4×182.8 cm.)
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota
gift of T.B. Walker Foundation, 63.34

painted *Eyes of Oedipus*, to *Blue at Noon* (fig. 10) of 1955, references to mythology became less direct as his paintings were increasingly dominated by all-over abstract rhythm.

Gottlieb had abandoned figurative painting in the early 40s. However, his "imaginary landscapes" begun in 1951 re-established a symbolic earth-sky division. "This does not mean that they were meant to be abstractions from the landscapes. But it's impossible to have a painting with a line going across from one side to the other without thinking of that as a horizon. Everybody automatically thinks of it that way. So I accepted this reaction . . . However, the problem which I was involved in was dividing the canvas into two parts and then having disparate images in each area . . ." For Gottlieb the challenge was to create unity by resolving the conflict of opposites.

Gottlieb's calligraphy in the bottom of *The Frozen*

Sounds, Number 1 (fig. 11) echoes shapes in the top half. In this and other "imaginary landscapes" he developed amazing variety within a limited vocabulary of ovoid and rectangular shapes contrasted with broad calligraphy. By giving them titles after they were painted he tells what they evoke in his mind, rather than what he had in mind before painting them.

The "imaginary landscapes" are a significant departure from the "pictographs." For Gottlieb not only reduced the complexity of the earlier pictures, he also abandoned their repetitive all-over composition, and reintroduced focal points. By contrasting large ovoid forms with bold calligraphy on a single color ground, Gottlieb created pictures compositionally unlike any other Abstract Expressionist.

By condensing the sprawling calligraphy, in 1957 Gottlieb introduced another phase of his work. The resulting jagged shape expresses a more explosive

energy than does earlier work. This shape is surrounded by the same color-field in which the sun-moon discs appear to float.

In these paintings, later called "bursts", he achieved a less illusory, quite flattened space, also suggesting depth. At first the most overpowering effect possible was emphasized. The paintings are large and color is strongly contrasted.

By 1964, the year he painted the Museum's *Summer* (Plate V), Gottlieb had introduced a subtle lyricism. The soft color harmony of *Summer* conveys a poetic aspect of this season. This is further carried out by the curving petal-like tips of the calligraphic burst. The muted tone of the corona around the yellow disc softens the contrast between the circle and background. By using the same device below, both forms appear to be on a plane which looks alternately flat then receding.

Unlike Reinhardt or Rothko, Gottlieb's pictures do not depend on large size for effectiveness. "It doesn't affect my thinking really. Normally my style in painting is related to a free movement of the arm. Naturally, if I work small, I have to work within the limitations of wrist movement."

In the resolution of opposing static and dynamic forces in Gottlieb's paintings most viewers associate the shapes with cosmic forces, which the artist said "is O.K. with me, but there are other people who see them as objects in outer space, which I vehemently reject."

Gottlieb's statement in the catalogue for *The New Decade: 35 American Painters and Sculptors* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1955, clearly states his views: "I frequently hear the question, 'What do these images mean?' This is simply the wrong question. Visual images do not have to conform to either verbal thinking or optical facts. A better question would be 'Do these images convey any emotional truth? . . . I consider myself a traditionalist, but I believe in the spirit of tradition, not in the restatement of restatements. I love all paintings that look the way I feel!'

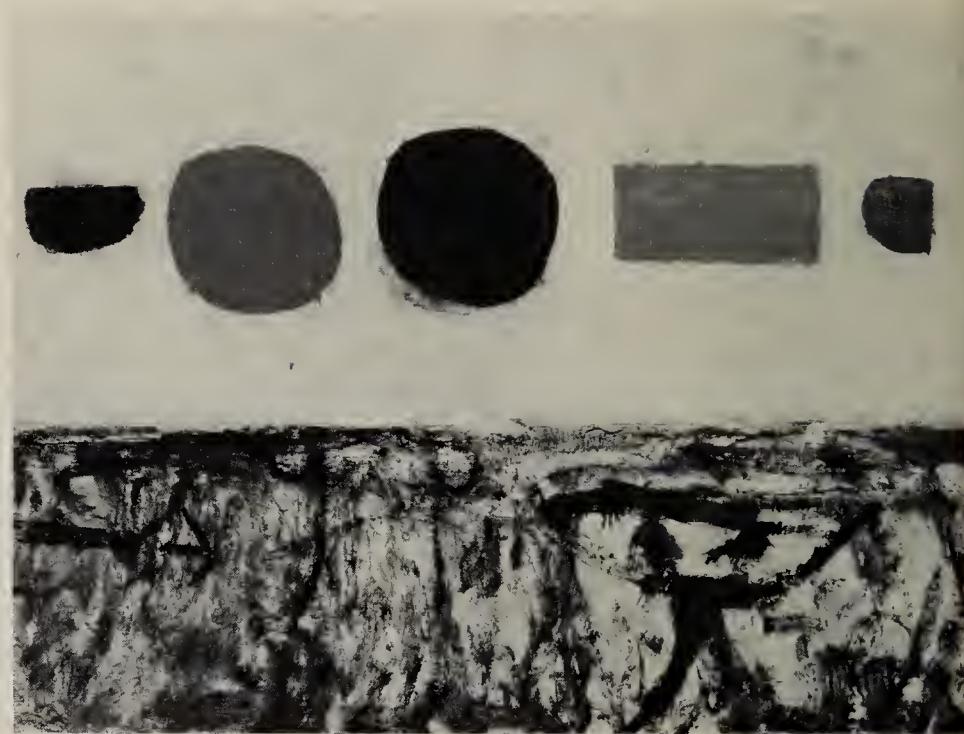


Figure 11
ADOLPH GOTTLIEB, American (1903-1974)
The Frozen Sounds, Number 1, 1951
Oil on canvas
36 × 48 in. (91.4 × 121.9 cm.)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel M. Kootz

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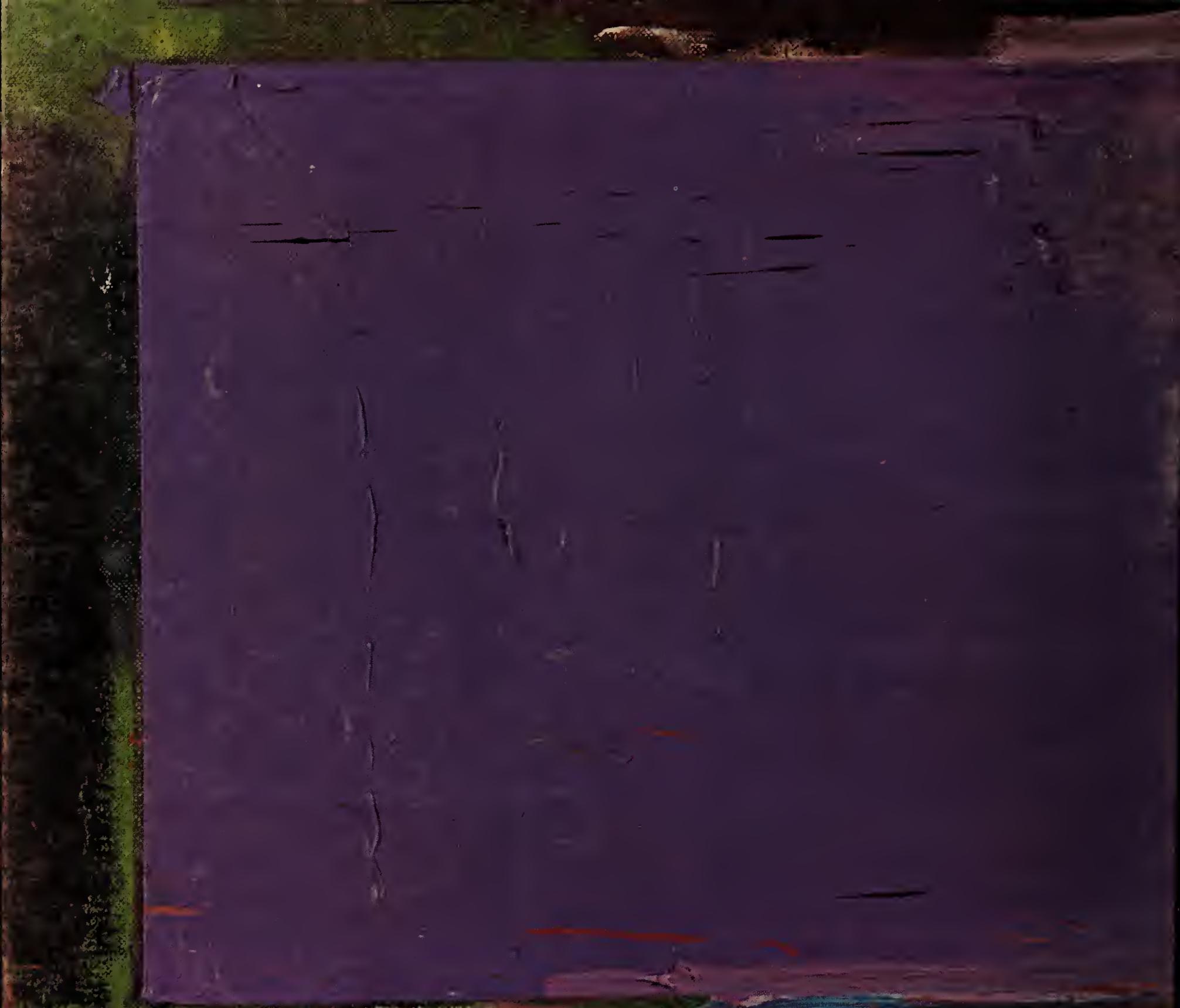
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